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16 best firewood to burn charts

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Did you know that all types of firewood behave entirely differently when burning? For example, some produce more smoke than others. Other types create sparks and pop, while some burn at a hotter temperature. So finding the best firewood to burn can make your fireplace work more smoothly. In addition, it will produce more pleasant odors and ensure your house doesn't fill with smoke.

A little word about fireplace safety

A wood that burns poorly can cause many problems. But, don't get us wrong; we love the aesthetics of a proper fireplace!

The ritual of selecting the best firewood, seasoning it, lighting the fireplace, and enjoying the warmth is mesmerizing. Once you get it going, add to the sensation the smoky smell, the crackling sound of the burning firewood, and the dancing flames. However, here at FFG, we care about protecting your home from fire hazards!

There's nothing worst than preparing your fireplace in the company of friends, only to have the flames fizzle out. Or suddenly, your house fills with smoke, and sparkles fly, catching something on fire.

Rotten firewood can irritate the lungs and, over time, may cause the dangerous build-up of soot in your chimney. One of our biggest concerns is the potential for firewood to spit out sparks and embers that may cause house fires.

As a general rule, hardwood is best for burning when the fire is hot and in full force. But it can be

helpful sometimes to use softwood or kindling to start the fire because softwood catches fire more easily.

Best Types of Firewood for Burning (Chart)

We have produced the following chart based on our research on the best burning types of firewood. This chart lists the best burning woods from best to worst. In addition, we've strategically selected the most common types of firewood you might find in the United States.

#	Type of Firewood	Weight (Lbs per cord – Seasoned)	Heat per cord (million BTUs)	Sparks & Pop	Amount of Smoke	Ease of Splitting
1	Black Locust	4,192 Lbs	29.3	Few	Low	Moderate

2	Hickory (Pecan)	4,072 Lbs	28.5	Medium	Low	Moderate
3	White Oak (e.g., Burr Oak)	3,776 Lbs	26.4	Few	Low	Easy
4	Honey Locust	3,680 Lbs	25.8	Few	Low	Easy
5	Red Oak	3,536 Lbs	24.8	Few	Low	Easy
6	White Ash	3,472 Lbs	24.3	Few	Low	Easy
7	Hard Maple	3,408 Lbs	23.9	Few	Heavy	Easy
8	Osage Orange	4,300 Lbs	30.1	Many	Low	Easy
9	Sycamore	2,872 Lbs	24.1	Few	Medium	Difficult
10	American Elm	2,872 Lbs	20.1	Few	Medium	Difficult
11	Hackberry	2,928 Lbs	20.5	Few	Low	Easy
12	Silver Maple	2,752 Lbs	19.0	Few	Low	Moderate
13	Southern Pine	2,936 Lbs	22.0	Few	Heavy	Easy
14	Eastern Redcar	2,812 Lbs	19.7	Many	Medium	Easy
15	Cottonwood	2,272 Lbs	15.9	Medium	Low	Easy
16	Willow	2,248 Lbs	15.7	Medium	Medium	Moderate

The above chart outlines the best firewood to burn, ranked from best to worst. Weights are estimations of fully seasoned wood, significantly lighter than greenwood. Most firewood racks carry a load of greenwood, allowing it to season over the summer while stacked and racked.

Higher BTUs represent woods that burn at a hotter temperature. Ease of splitting relates to the comfort of splitting seasoned wood, not greenwood.

We selected these types of firewood because they are the most common types of wood in North America, including the United States and Canada.

Shortlist of the 3 Best Firewood to Burn

While the above list is quite comprehensive, it can become overwhelming. Therefore, we've selected three types that we consider the best firewood to burn. If you can get a cord from one of these lists, don't hesitate!

1. Black Locust

Specifications:

- **Weight –** 4,192 Lbs per cord of seasoned wood
- **Heat Output per Cord –** 29.3 million BTUs
- **Sparks and Pop –** Low
- **Amount of Smoke –** Low
- **Ease of Splitting –** Moderate

Most people consider black locust to be the best firewood to burn. It is a hot-burning hardwood with low smoke output due to its smooth, clean burn.

Black Locust is ideal for providing heat. Of all significant types of firewood, it burns the hottest. We measure heat output via BTUs. The higher the BTUs per cord of wood, the hotter it burns. Seasoned Black Locust firewood burns at around 29.3 million BTUs per cord. It's significantly higher than competitors such as Oak, Ash, and Maple trees.

Therefore, it's best to burn in a home fireplace to provide heat in the dead of winter.

But an additional charming part of Black Locust wood is that it spits low sparks, pop, and rogue embers. So it makes it somewhat safer than many other types of firewood for minimizing accidental fires. But that doesn't make it *safe*. You must still supervise fire and use a fireplace screen to reduce risk.

2. Hickory

- **Weight –** 4,072 Lbs per cord of seasoned wood
- **Heat Output per Cord –** 28.5 million BTUs
- **Sparks and Pop –** Medium
- **Amount of Smoke –** Low
- **Ease of Splitting –** Moderate

Hickory is a North American wood known for its strength, density, stiffness, and toughness. There are 18 different types of hickory, including Pecan. Materials such as tools, ladders, and flooring are typical of this wood.

It is very similar in density and burning characteristics to Black Locust. It burns scorching, making it ideal for home heating and interior fireplaces. Due to its density, hot coals remain for a long time, allowing continued ongoing heating for an entire winter's evening.

The minimal smoke output for this firewood similarly makes it ideal for burning under an indoor chimney.

While it sparks more than some alternatives, it's not known as a temperamental wood. Nonetheless, it's essential to monitor it while it burns.

3. White Oak (e.g., Burr Oak)

- **Weight –** 3,776 Lbs per cord of seasoned wood
- **Heat Output per Cord –** 26.4 million BTUs
- **Sparks and Pop –** Few
- **Amount of Smoke –** Low
- **Ease of Splitting –** Easy

White Oaks include sub-categories such as Burr Oak and Post Oak. As a dense hardwood, it is perfect for burning for heat. It coals well and burns for an extended time as hot coals. With minimal sparking, it's relatively unlikely to cause spot fires, although there is always a risk.

Additionally, White Oak is known for being easy to split when well seasoned, making it an easy-to-use wood.

It is further down the sale than Black Locust in heat output but has relatively high BTUs. White Oak remains one of the superior woods for heating and using as a central log in a fireplace.

Criteria for Choosing Firewood

Amount of Smoke

Smoke is one of the most important considerations for us. An excessively smoky fire can ruin a campfire – or smoke everyone out of your living room! There's nothing worse than constantly spinning around a fire, trying to avoid the wrath of the smoke.

While some woods are inherently smokier, you can avoid a smoky fire in some significant ways. Firstly, ensure the timber is well seasoned. For example, greenwood causes excessive smoke in comparison to dry wood. So – season your wood, or buy well-seasoned lumber!

The other way to minimize smoke is to ensure a smooth burn. A fire that doesn't have enough oxygen flowing through the fire will sputter and cause excessive smoke. If you've got a permanent fire pit or indoor fireplace, consider getting a fireplace grate that lifts the wood off the ground. This feature will allow a better flow of oxygen to the underside of the fire.

Burning Heat (BTUs)

A block of hotter burning wood will be better for heating your home. These higher BTU woods with low smoke output are ideal for home fireplaces in wintertime.

Examples of this type of firewood include Black Locust and Hickory woods.

We measure wood heat using BTUs, which stands for British thermal units. It is a quaint old metric but continues to be the standard for measuring the heating potential of timber. The metric derives from the amount of heat it takes to heat one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit.

When it comes to firewood, we tend to measure it by BTUs per cord of wood. Timberline is *a lot* of wood – more than a regular household can get through in one winter. So you're more likely to buy a quarter or eighth to a cord of wood each winter.

Most firewood types can output between 15 (low) and 30 (high) million BTUs per cord of wood.

Weight

The weight of wood differs significantly between when it is green and seasoned. We have provided approximate weights for a cord of seasoned wood for each variety in the chart above. You might notice a clear correlation between the importance of wood and its burning heat. Denser firewood has more fuel in a more condensed space, allowing it to burn at a hotter rate.

Popping and Sparking

Woods that pop and spark will often spit out embers that cause secondary fires. It's a safety recommendation because they are a common cause of house fires. Some woods naturally pop and spark more than others. Oaks and Elms are known for having minimal sparks. At the same time, Osage Orange is particularly well-known for its propensity to 'pop.'

While a wood that causes less popping and sparking is better than a wood that causes more, no fire is safe. A slight breeze or change in wind direction is all it takes to spill embers out of the fire onto nearby fuels. So, monitoring and supervising your fire is essential to ensure no secondary spot fire flare-up. Remember to put out your campfire entirely before heading to sleep.

Fragrance

All woods give off a fragrance, but some are significantly more notable than others. We find a strong scent is acceptable for outdoor camping. Still, fragrant solid firewood in your living room fireplace may be too potent, given it's a confined space.

Consider getting cedar or pine if you want a fire with a pleasant fresh earthy smell. These woods give off a classic forest smell, but they're also known for being smoky burners. Neither of these woods is an excellent firewood, but they are often burned on campfires purely for their fragrance.

Woods that give off pleasant fragrances and burn well include Hickory and Oak. Both will give off a subtle but pleasant smell.

Quality of Coals

It will burn down to coals at the end of a fire's life. Some woods turn to denser, longer-burning coals, while others turn to crumble ash that won't last too long into the night. People who want

to cook over a fire are often most concerned about the quality of the coals. A lump of hot coal is perfect for cooking over a campfire cooking grate.

Beechwood and American Elm are two types of wood well known for their coaling qualities. They're perfect for a campfire cookout. Sadly, Black Locust, which is otherwise our pick as the best firewood, isn't so good for coal.

However, there are some positives to firewood that crumbles like coal. For one thing, it's usually much easier to put out and ensure it won't re-ignite overnight or after you have left the campsite.

Frequently Asked Questions

What wood should you not burn?

You should not use all types of wood as firewood. The first and most important is driftwood that you might find on a beach. This wood has washed up from the ocean or waterways, absorbing toxins, salts, and minerals from the water. When burned, this components release into the atmosphere. Those toxins may cause damage to you and the ecosystem. So don't burn driftwood.

Next is endangered species woods, or woods from protected parks. Many protected parks have rules designed to prevent people from taking wood, which is a necessary part of the forest's ecosystem. For example, woods can form fuels and mulch for new plants to grow and animal habitats. Similarly, some trees in protected parks may be endangered species that need protection.

It's usually best not to burn wood that hasn't fully seasoned. Instead, it's best to have a few months of sun and wind exposure. This exposure will allow the moisture to get out of the timber and dry it out thoroughly. This seasoning means less water in the wood, which prevents the

wood from burning smoothly.

Lastly, don't burn softwood – stick to hardwood only. This advice isn't for any safety or environmental reason. The reason is simple: it doesn't burn well! It burns out fast, doesn't burn to coals, and creates heat.

Which is the Best Firewood for Heating your Home?

We would select Black Locust as the best firewood for heating. It lets off the highest heat per pound and burns nice and smoothly. Other suitable types of wood that are good for heating are Hickory and White Oak. Ensure it's well seasoned and has good access to oxygen for an excellent smooth solid burn.

Which is the Best Firewood for a Stove?

Hardwoods are best for burning on a stove. Hickory, Oak, Ask, or Locust varieties will all work well. It's a good idea to check your manual to ensure you're burning the correct type of wood. Furthermore, you're only burning well-seasoned woods, so their moisture content is 10 and 15 percent.

Which firewood lets off the Least Smoke?

Many different factors contribute to how much smoke a fire will let off. The adage "where there's smoke, there's fire" still stands: any wood will let off smoke. But some burn more smoothly than others, letting off softer and less intense smoke.

As a general rule, the more well-seasoned (and less moist) wood is, the less smoky the fire will be. This behavior is due to water, which contributes to smokiness. Consider, for example, how smoky green leaves are when thrown onto a fire.

The other general rule is that hardwood smokes less than softwood because hardwood is denser and burns slower.

The best firewood to burn is usually wood that is dense and well-seasoned. Locusts and Oaks match these density criteria well. With density comes a hotter burn and better, longer-lasting coals. Well-seasoned firewood tends to smoke less and burn more easily. So no matter the type of firewood you use, ensure it is well seasoned to have an excellent high-quality burn.

References and Further Reading

- https://forestry.usu.edu/forest-products/wood-heating

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